Life is often referred to as a journey – a journey that we embark upon to reach a destination. This subtly hints at the fact that man is often driven by a desire to reach somewhere. There is always something that he wants. And, to realise that something, that elusive goal, he sets himself on the journey of life. The mystery is that he is rarely aware of where he wants to go. He lacks a sense of direction. Therefore, to navigate the twists and the turns of the path, and to choose the path for him, he finds someone who can lead him. The need to ‘follow’ could be for two reasons. For one, he knows neither the destination nor the path. Secondly, even if man knows the destination, he does not know the path that leads to the same. In either case, he feels the increasing need to be led. And, to ease the ordeal of travelling a long and arduous path, he allows himself to be led. This pressing need unconsciously creates the idea of a ‘master’ who can lead him to his end or goal.

Man makes an effort to lead a life aimed at a set of goals. Little does he realise that it is life that leads him on, because it has an innate inbuilt matrix which directs and regulates man’s sojourn.

In these lines, the present chapter raises a couple of important questions – ‘What is the destination of life?’ ‘What is the path like?’ And, perhaps, the most significant question – ‘Who is ‘the Master,’ in possession of knowledge as regards the
true purpose of life, who can/will lead?’ The two novels, *The Message to the Planet* and *The Green Knight*, answer different facets of these questions in a subtle, yet profound, manner.

This chapter attempts to use narratology by identifying ‘actants’ and ‘functions’ (in the novels) which define the narrative system. There are recurrent motifs in these novels that directly and indirectly suggest that Marcus and Peter Mir represent ‘the master’ which the chapter considers as Actant one. Since the other characters in the novels are constantly pursuing or ‘following’ the master characters, the chapter acknowledges ‘following’ as the other Actant. The integral structural elements upon which these two ‘actants’ revolve in the novels are varied. Some of such ‘functions’, which directly and subtly acknowledge the protagonists as ‘the master’ and also reflect the eagerness on part of the other characters to ‘follow’ them, are: Dialogues (Pat’s cries that he is just “looking for a master”); Narration (the narrator says, “He (Ludens) still, still, wanted, if ever it might be possible, to follow Marcus over the threshold’’); Character-portrayal (the protagonists are described as ‘supernatural’, ‘guru’, ‘saviour’, ‘conscience’); Images, Symbols and Allusions (path, master-talisman, bicycle, characters’ dreams, house interiors of Marcus and Peter Mir, references to ‘Christ’, ‘Green Knight’, ‘Leonardo Da Vinci’); Archetypes (‘senex’, ‘Quest’). These are a few samples. The chapter, in the course of analysis, identifies and elaborates on these varied motifs.

In a very casual context, Aleph says to Harvey, “‘Everything deep loves a mask?’” (Murdoch, *The Green Knight* 213). This statement presents the knotty predicament of one who is in quest of the real in life. How can one ever find the object of his pursuit when it is always masked? Finding the master who can lead us through life is another such predicament.
In Murdoch’s *The Message to the Planet*, when Pat becomes seriously ill, Ludens goes in search of Marcus (referred to as the master by many characters) to persuade him to remove the curse. When Ludens reaches Redcottage, he finds Marcus in a bizarre state, “The posture, the exotic garb, seemed that of a foreigner, perhaps an Indian, the complexion too looked dark, the face, surly with anxiety or concentration, unlike Marcus’s . . . but as if disguised, in fancy dress” (73). In fact, the novel recurrently describes Marcus as disguised. When his friends meet him after a long time, they observe that he looked “. . . like a poor student in an opera who is of course a prince in disguise” (13).

When the reader delves into the inside of Marcus – who is playing a part – he finds that Marcus holds a position of prominence. The narrator says that “His undiminished presence and his soft authoritative gritty honey-voice made him seem like a distinguished actor playing the part of an impoverished statesman in exile or a famous leader in disguise” (53).

The Master is also portrayed as one who is endowed with inimitable brilliance:

Vallar was a great mathematician, a genius at nineteen, indeed, as Ludens and his friends, meditating upon the Vallar mystery, pointed out to each other, a genius at three, since he had been a mathematical infant prodigy. At nineteen he discovered something amazing called the Vallar Theorem which shook the mathematical world and interested astrophysicists. After that, after the great explosion of intellectual sovereignty, and fame, less was heard of Vallar. He was after a few years said to be ‘burnt out’, as such precociously brilliant thinkers often were. He amused himself by becoming a chess champion. He showed no interest in physics or mathematical logic, he despised computers, he was briefly fascinated by philosophy but soon ‘saw through it’ – he had found, as they said, intellectually speaking, ‘nowhere to go’. . . . ‘He had to be king or nothing.’ (7-8)

While, on the one hand, the narrator gives us the impression that the master is ‘someone’; on the other, he leads the reader into a world of enigma where even a minute reference to the master’s personality is shrouded in obscurity and mystery. In
The Green Knight, after Moy’s birthday party, when everybody tries to guess what character in fiction the master, Peter Mir, could be, Lousie says he is Mr. Pickwick, Sefton says he’s like Prospero, Aleph says he is the Green Knight, Moy says he is the Minotaur and Clement says he is Mephistopheles. This shows that even Peter Mir’s character in The Green Knight is covered in mystery. He appears unannounced in the characters’ lives, creates ripples, resolves some of their conflicts, and, in the end, disappears as a nobody. In a way, the characters in the novel both love and loathe him. They consider him a monster and a master. Mir himself reveals to Clement, who calls him dangerous: “‘Dangerous, yes. With the innocent I shall be innocent, and with the devilish, a devil’” (Murdoch, GK 220). In either case, the truth of his being is kept hidden or masked from the reader.

The depiction of these ‘master’ characters in both the novels catches particular attention when the other characters feel themselves to be closely connected and distant from them at the same time. The protagonists are portrayed as those who are intensely loved, yet remain outsiders till the end. Marcus, especially, is, at various junctures, subtly represented and treated like an outsider:

. . . Marcus was Jewish, and must be, from the reddish hair, Sephardic. Marcus had a deep soft voice, slightly sing-song, slightly roughened, thickened like crystalline honey, which emerged with an arresting slow deliberation. His utterance was emphatic and precise, and although having grown up mainly in England and having acquired a Cambridge accent, he spoke like a foreigner. (Murdoch, MP 9)

The recurring references to Marcus as a foreigner and outsider hint at the unfamiliar element in his nature that stands as a barrier to general understanding. Though the apparent obscurity in the portrayal of this character asserts the enigma of his appeal, the plot gradually reveals that Marcus is beyond the realm of human thought and is, hence, perhaps, beyond human comprehension. In fact, the novel introduces Marcus
as someone “... of some universal, more than human, charm” (9), with “large long grey eyes which could express some almost supernatural degree of attention” (8). Though his friends notify one another that Marcus is raving mad, they still acknowledge that he is some sort of a ‘Superman’ (2).

All these characteristics indicate that the ‘master’ character is more a symbol than someone real. In fact, Elizabeth Dipple, a critic, refers to Marcus as “an image or a series of images and metaphors” (qtd. in Antonaccio, William Schweiker 160) and Peter Mir is called as a “magical symbolic being” (162).

In a way, Marcus Vallar and Peter Mir represent the wise old man who is one of the archetypes described by Carl Jung. In Jungian analytical psychology, this archetype is associated with the term, ‘senex’ or the ‘mana-personality’. Also referred to as ‘sage’ or ‘sophos’, these personalities are symbols of the power and wisdom that lie deep within the psyche. And like any other contents of the unconscious they may be projected. When man, instead of trying to access the inner reservoir of power and wisdom, may choose to disown it and see it as someone else’s possession, the ‘mana’ archetype is constellated.

Due to his superhuman abilities, the wise old man, is often considered foreign. He offers guidance to pupils, which in a very mystical way, may impress upon them a sense of their potential and reality. Sometimes, due to intense engagement with philosophical pursuits, he may even appear as an absent-minded professor. This character type often suggests to the knights or heroes (questing for the Holy Grail), the implication of their encounters. Generally, the character of the wise old man, in a story, either disappears for a while or dies to allow the hero to become independent
and work for his own progress. According to Jung’s individuation process, this archetype is nothing but an indication of the Self.

The references to Marcus as ‘a distinguished actor’ even suggest that, perhaps, his role is self-created (indication of the self). There are certain characters in the novel who perceive him as a creation: Bellamy thinks of Peter Mir as a victim who “. . . had risen wonderfully from the dead like Lazarus” (Murdoch, GK 153). Rising from the dead means coming back to life miraculously and mysteriously from nowhere (the unknown world of death). Similarly, Mir also appears in the novels from nowhere as if he was suddenly created. His creation is, however, endowed with virtues rather than vices, turning him into a ‘master’, to be followed and loved, invoking a degree of fear and awe. Bellamy tells Emil about Mir, “‘. . . I think of him as an avatar, I mean an incarnation, a pure sinless creature, a very special visitor to this awful scene, like an angel – I can’t express it’ ” (450). At the Benbow, amidst the confusing scenario of Marcus being worshipped as God, Franca and Tether go to meet Marcus. Franca, who generally resents Marcus’s unkind disposition, unconsciously “. . . sat very upright staring at Marcus’s face: it was as if it had been peeled, a mask removed, it glowed with cleanness, radiantly smooth, like a face in an illuminated picture. . . . Franca, automatically thinking of Christ at Emmaus, banished the image or rather stored it” (Murdoch, MP 350). Her ability to engage with the perception of Marcus’s desirability raises him to the unprecedented stature of a saviour and guide (within): Daniel Most views Marcus as the “conscience . . . to preserve the memory of what evil is and good is” (417).

At this point, an arresting thought emerges – ‘Who has created him?’ The novel does not explicitly answer this question. But, it does something even more important – it raises the question:
He [Ludens] then attempted, after each conversation, to write out, in one of the other flimsy notebooks, in his own square fair hand, the main points of the conversation. Sometimes, here, Ludens felt as if he were leading a nervous-spirited horse round a course, a terrible course with very high jumps, where there would be dreadful falls and broken backs, only now they were just surveying the course, feeling the turf, looking at the jumps. Naturally in this image Ludens did not figure as the rider of the horse. He was merely a groom or stable lad, always nervously aware of the wild eye, the jerking head, the prancing gait, the strong powerful legs whose kick could be death, the power and dangerousness of the creature, and its beauty. Who the rider was or was to be never, in the development of this imagery, emerged; some god perhaps, Eros himself, or dread Apollo. Or rather, better, Marcus was a centaur, horse and rider in one. (280-81)

A close look at Ludens’s efforts to note down and interpret Marcus’s inarticulate deliberations hints at the possibility that the message and the idea of the master have been fashioned by Ludens’s own imagination. So, instead of being led, is he actually leading? After Marcus’s death, Dr. Marzillian tells Ludens not to blame himself for not having prevented Marcus’s death. He also reminds Ludens that he was all the while fighting a losing battle. However, the most revealing part of their conversation is –

‘. . . . But you were, in this whole story, the essential thing, the catalyst, the saving and enabling figure. Without you he might have sunk into that dark sea. You stirred his mind, you made him think at a time when just this was necessary. He could not have talked to anyone else. With a sure instinct you led him on, not as it happened where you wished, but where he wished. You took care of him, you cherished him, your love gave him quietness and order and calm and space.’ (500)

Much to the surprise of the reader, these words declare that it is Ludens who plays the most important role in the plot, not Marcus. The attention is instantly diverted towards the accomplishments of Ludens and not Marcus’s. The spell that the plot tries to wind around the reader is suddenly broken when Marzillian’s words shift the reader’s attention from Marcus to Ludens. Marzillian’s observation that Ludens is the one who stirred Marcus’s mind, who made him think, who loved him, cherished him, and so
on, reiterates the fact that Marcus is Ludens’s creation and, therefore, would cease to exist without Ludens. Indeed, Marcus would sink into the dark sea without Ludens, because it is Ludens who gave life to Marcus. It is Marzillian who reveals this fact to Ludens. Elizabeth Dipple supports the same, saying, “... meaning is entirely mind-dependent, because Ludens, playing with his interpretations, creates an idea of Marcus that the action and diverse thought patterns of the novel are calculated to deny” (qtd. in Antonaccio, William Schweiker 159).

But the question is, is Ludens unaware of this? Throughout the novel, one finds that Ludens makes persistent efforts to persuade Marcus to write the ultimate message for the planet, and is disappointed when Marcus repeatedly tells him that he is unable to write it or, even worse, that he has nothing to write. And, instead of giving up the vain pursuit, Ludens, surprisingly, becomes even more determined to ‘make’ Marcus find the message and write it. He assures Marcus,

‘... Be guided by me, dear Marcus – I see now and I think I understand, the spirit that visited you was a wise spirit – all this time you’ve been pushing at things, at great things, at the deepest problems of mankind – like a – like a bull, and battering yourself at the barriers of language and thought, at the very edge at the perimeter of human knowledge. . . .’ (Murdoch, MP 378)

Ludens’s instruction to Marcus to be guided by him indirectly suggests that he is aware that the meaning and the message lie not with Marcus but with himself. Perhaps, he chose to be blind to this fact. When he repeatedly encounters Marcus’s inability to reveal the absolute wisdom, he is forced to admit that he is the one who is the guide. Murdoch says, “people are not only manipulated by others but want to be so. . . . People very often elect a god in their lives, they elect somebody whose puppet they want to be, and . . . almost subconsciously, are ready to receive suggestions from this person” (qtd. in Tucker 192).
Nevertheless, the creation of the ‘master’ figure is not an altogether futile act. On the contrary, it is a necessary one. This is because it is only by persistently following Marcus with the desire to discover him that Ludens seems to discover himself. An interesting dimension to this can be unveiled if the reader superimposes Marcus’s predicament on Ludens’s life. Then, the reader finds that, all this time, it is Ludens and not Marcus who has “‘... been pushing at things, at great things, at the deepest problems of mankind. ...’” (Murdoch, MP 378). Thus, once the suggestion that ‘the master’ in Marcus is Ludens’s creation is well-established, the novel begins to gradually uncover the mystery of Ludens’s predicament which has been disguised in Marcus’s life.

Therefore, the novel strongly suggests that it is we who give rise to the idea of the ‘master’, a leader to be followed, in order to, perhaps, project our need for meaning on something external to ourselves, believing that we have an exclusive accessibility to the key that can unlock the mystery of life. Therefore, the characters in the novel are constantly engaged in a search for meaning. They ‘seem’ to think that, that which they cannot find in themselves, may be found in Marcus. And, this drives them and, especially, Ludens, to follow Marcus, forcing the awareness of his self-created master’s reality into a state of deliberate oblivion. In the process, Ludens unconsciously attaches himself to the idea of the master which he has created, believing Marcus to be an entity independent of himself. The narrator says,

Whereas what happened to Ludens, who was certainly ‘attached’, was that he had begun to take a deep and passionate interest in Marcus’s ideas, in which he clearly ‘saw’ something which the others did not. He was not content, as they were, to admit that he did not understand. This interest later on became an obsession, as if Marcus were the possessor of an intellectual secret, some master-key, talisman, password or radiant lump of deep fundamental knowledge which, if it could be acquired, would shine through all other knowledge, utterly transforming it. (12-13)
Despite his repeated failures to make Marcus think of the message, Ludens still chooses to see in Marcus what others do not see. He becomes attached more to the ‘idea of the master’ than to the task or ‘message of the master.’ A reference to art in The Black Prince, gives an insight into the same: “Art . . . is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths. Yet how almost impossibly difficult it is not to let the marvels of the instrument itself interfere with the task to which it is dedicated” (qtd. in Bloom 141). This proves utterly true even with life, especially when the readers witness how Ludens attaches himself more to the master (an instrument) than to the task that the master performs.

The need to find the meaning outside of himself is validated when the narrator, describing Ludens’s painful endeavours to unleash the secret from Marcus, comments,

He was, as it were, a teacher who has a pupil, an idle and confused pupil, who is far more brilliant than himself and must be coaxed, encouraged, if necessary scolded, beaten. What a strange image! But it came to him more clearly than ever that Marcus had for long, for too long, been collecting and harbouring ideas which must now be classified, organized, articulated, sifted, connected, written down. He recalled the word Marzillian had used – Marcus did not need to be cured, but to be enabled. (Murdoch, MP 264)

These lines delineate Ludens’s desperation for an answer. He not only attempts to coax it out of Marcus, but is also ready to force it out of him. His image of Marcus as an idle and confused pupil, and his belief in Marzillian’s words that Marcus needs to be ‘enabled,’ suggest that Marcus is a mere puppet in Ludens’s hands. It reveals that Marcus does not have a mind of his own and has no power, and, hence, someone needs to ‘enable’ him. This gives a glimpse into the actual nature of the master. Further, the image of a teacher cajoling the pupil to give an answer is rightly referred to as strange, because Ludens is, in truth, cajoling the master puppet, who is the child
of his imagination, to give him the answers he already knows. This reiterates our desperation to seek meaning in the external and also our need for projection. However, on the same note, Marzillian’s appeal to ‘enable’ Marcus also highlights one’s need to create the master – perhaps, to enable oneself to understand the truth that meaning does not lie without.

While, on the one hand, the novel subtly emphasises on the need to create a master; on the other, it hints at the danger involved in such a creation. The novel recurrently suggests that the process of creating and following the master is not altogether simple and safe. At one point in the novel, Irina, annoyed by Ludens’s repeated efforts to make Marcus think, tells Ludens,

‘. . . . You’ve been following him round for years trying to get out of him some secret you imagine he possesses. You’re always winding him up, driving him on, making him believe in his secret. While you’re around he feels he’s got to go on and on pursuing the great idea or whatever it is. . . . Chosen, forsooth! But suppose there isn’t such a thing as the thing he’s after, or suppose that there is but he’s utterly incapable of finding it, or suppose that the thing is actually unimportant, or even bad – and consider that this obsession is making him frustrated and exhausted and miserable and unable to live or even meet any other human beings – and damaging my life, and perhaps yours, in fact certainly yours?’ (228)

Irina’s belief that it is Ludens who is driving Marcus on, and making him believe in his secret, reiterates the fact that the master is not the driving force. It is, as she rightly intuits, Ludens who is giving him significance. Furthermore, another insightful dimension to her words can be found in the declaration that the entire process of following Marcus or the master is certainly damaging because, as she says, there is, perhaps, no such thing that he is after. In that case, the entire endeavour of following Marcus is certainly pointless. It is pointless not only because Marcus is not in possession of any secret or message, but because, in truth, the solution or the message is not and cannot be found without. Cheryl K. Bove validates this, saying, “In many
ways Marcus becomes whatever his followers need. Their willingness to accept him as a vicarious victim attests to the spiritual void which Iris Murdoch believes exists in the modern consciousness” (Bove 129).

Above all, by driving Marcus and making Marcus believe in the secret, Ludens is actually ‘driving’ himself and ‘making’ himself believe in the master and the secret. As a result, Ludens is unconsciously making his creation even more concrete and established, to the extent that he is readily deceiving himself by believing it to be a separate entity. His identity with this entity that his ego has created stifles his consciousness. In fact, his overt attachment to his creation and imagination creates a sense of duality or divide between him and his true self. Subsequently, what arises is the loss of his identity which is the most ‘damaging’ factor that Irina’s unconscious apprehensions, perhaps, suggest:

. . . . Marcus’s thoughts were frightening, they were terrible thoughts which were breaking themselves upon the unrelenting barriers of human capacity, thoughts one might die of, thoughts which might make others die. Ludens suddenly pictured Marcus’s thoughts as large black eagles hurling themselves again and again upon a vast opaque motionless sheet of glass. And yet these brave heroic thoughts would be, to almost all people, not only unintelligible but nonsensical, futile, a waste of mental power, a waste of human will – while millions starved. . . . But Ludens did not want Marcus to stop thinking. He still, still, wanted, if ever it might be possible, to follow Marcus over the threshold, through the looking-glass. (Murdoch, MP 237)

These lines suggest that in order to concretise the illusion that we imagine to be reality, we are willing, to subject ourselves to an enormous amount of agony and anguish – at times, even at the cost of sanity. Further, the novel suggests that when we constantly associate ourselves with the idea we create, we get tied to it. This is to say that a constant association of oneself with the master often results in one’s destiny getting tied to his. In the novel, Marcus, who is said to never feel the need to publicise his acquaintance with any of the characters, surprisingly, introduces Ludens to
Dr. Marzillian, “‘Dr Ludens is a scholar, he is my friend and pupil. He sometimes helps me with my work’” (204). Ludens, who has, by now, successfully begun to see his creation of ‘the master’ as different from himself, is elated that ‘the master’ has acknowledged him. This makes him more determined to follow him, not merely to benefit from him, but to cherish him, to care for him, to love him and to be loved by him. Once again, this reflects his blinding attachment to ‘the master’ which drives him to be not merely his pupil but his slave. Highlighting this, the narrator remarks, referring to Ludens,

He had even allowed himself to be irritated by Patrick’s impudent image of himself as Marcus’s dog. If Marcus had a dog, Ludens was that animal. In fact, and at least at present, Ludens had little reason to complain since he remained, with Marcus, the closest person, not exactly the beloved disciple, but the most valuable agent. (134)

From this, one may discern that Ludens is not only tied to Marcus’s destiny, but has, in truth, become a slave of his own creation. The narrator also hints at Ludens’s jealousy of Patrick. This jealousy is the outcome of his strong sense of ownership. This shows the close association of man’s ego with its creations. In an attempt to concretise his illusory creations, man confuses the figment of his imagination for the reality. Murdoch in one of her philosophical treatises says, “The world which we confront is not just a world of ‘facts’ but a world upon which our imagination has, at any given moment, already worked [. . .]. Each of us lives and chooses within a partly private, partly fabricated world” (qtd. in Robjant 999).

Ludens is definitely the closest acquaintance of Marcus but, as the narrator skillfully puts it, ‘not exactly the beloved disciple, but the most valuable agent’ – an agent, indeed, who enables the very existence of the idea of Marcus. Even Jack, who is unconsciously deeply attached to Marcus, reiterates the illusion that Marcus is someone with power. When Ludens suggests a change in style as a solution to Jack’s
sudden inability to paint, Jack replies, “‘I know, I’m trying to, I can’t, the power has been withdrawn. I can’t learn again now. It’s all to do with bloody Marcus’” (Murdoch, MP 176). The novel, thus, suggests that the constant engagement with the idea of the master is ‘damaging’ also because one becomes a slave to one’s own idea to the extent that it takes over, leaving one helpless. Jung supports this saying,

Possession by an archetype turns a man into a flat collective figure, a mask behind which he can no longer develop as a human being, but becomes increasingly stunted. One must therefore beware of the danger of falling victim to the dominant of the mana-personality. The danger lies not only in oneself becoming a father-mask, but in being overpowered by this mask when worn by another. Master and pupil are in the same boat in this respect. (qtd.in Storr 124)

The one possessed by the archetype, becomes ‘helpless’ also because it deludes him sometimes into believing that the master exists exclusively to impart meaning to his life, which is quite contrary to the reality. In the case of Ludens, this delusion takes the form of determination “‘. . . to pin Marcus down, to orient and manoeuvre the discussion so as to force him to reveal, at least to name, his deepest, ultimate conception, the thing itself which he was really after” (Murdoch, MP 53). The illusion that the meaning lies with the master is further enhanced when, to some of the characters, the meaning becomes the master. This is made even more evident when, on Marcus’s death, Pat cries out, “‘. . . I don’t know what I’ll do with myself now. He was the meaning of my life. . . He gave me a place in the world. I’ve always felt I was an animal, a weird strange animal like no other animal, not really a man, but like a poor unhappy animal with no mate, just looking for a master. . .’” (475). Even Bellamy, upon the death of Peter, cries out that Peter “‘. . . could have shown him the reality” (Murdoch, GK 452). Hence, it is clear that Pat and Bellamy mourn not just the loss of the master but the loss of the meaning which they believed was in the possession of the master. Their heartbroken words echo the symbolic cry of man who
wrongly believes that meaning ceases to exist in the absence of the master. Again, this highlights the illusion that the master is a separate entity and that meaning is present in something external, and that one has an exclusive right to the master and the meaning.

When man follows a master to help him through the journey of life, he is, indeed, desperate for meaning and answers. But the question is – does he get what he wants? No. Then what does he achieve? At one point, Ludens desperately pleads with Marcus, “. . . Alright, you are travelling on. Just please take me with you.” Then, Marcus replies, “You don’t know what you are asking. There is no light where I am. If any comes it is not enlightenment but lightning” (Murdoch, MP 397). The novel makes it clear that it is pointless to follow the master in pursuit of meaning and message especially when, as Marcus admits, he is himself encompassed in darkness. Such a master cannot lead Ludens to light or truth. Moreover, Marcus’s words endorse Irina’s fears that the outcome of following him is damage and destruction, an outcome which he refers to as ‘lightning’. It is Ludens who goes on giving shape and significance to the meaning which he believes will redeem mankind. He supposes that the meaning is latent in certain ‘words’ which are like sign posts that lead man to his destination. In a dialogue between Ludens and Marcus, Ludens says,

‘. . . Surely it’s your duty to leave a record, to leave a sign, nothing else need concern you. It’s a risk you must take. Even if you only wrote one page.’
‘You think it is a little thing to write one page? Such knowledge is an experience which words can degrade. That is part of the problem. You have run after me to find out this thing as if it were just an answer to a riddle, or a joke which you remembered half of. Well, I suppose it is a riddle – and it may be – a joke.’ (162)

Ludens presumes that he is running after meaning but, in truth, what he has been running after all along is only an illusion of meaning. Marcus’s words give a deep insight into how this search for meaning is either a riddle or a joke. In either case, it is
insubstantial and shallow. That is why it is frivolous to search for ‘the meaning’ because, like the master, even the meaning is an illusion.

Thus, the journey in pursuit of illusion only creates a great deal of fatigue. In the last few days, at Benbow,

... Ludens himself did a good deal of walking. His mind, divided between happiness and unhappiness, hope and fear, was extremely distressed. He realised now that living at such close quarters with Marcus and Irina was indeed, as Irina had indicated to him, difficult, a strain, complicating everything at every point. (423)

Finally, Ludens realises, at least partially, that a close association with the idea of a master is distressing. Furthermore it is, as is suggested above, even complicating, because Ludens is divided not merely between happiness and unhappiness, hope and fear, but between the true self and the created entity. The more he believes that this entity is independent of his projection, the more he is pulled outward, towards the external, away from his true self. And, it is precisely this that confuses the reality, complicating the journey of life and making it tiresome and tedious. Though man does not fully understand the reason for this complication, due to the sheer pressure of his predicament he begins to feel the need to break away from the idea of the master.

So, we do not get what we want. But, do we finally understand what we want? Partially, yes. We may still not understand the nature of truth but the fact that we are intrigued by illusion and caught in its vicious circle implies that we will, eventually, feel the need to move away from it. Towards the end of the novel, Ludens is surprised to find Jack painting a human figure (something that Jack could not get himself to do throughout the novel). When questioned, Jack says,

‘It’s awful, but at least I can try, I work every day, I feel I’ve got to fight my way out of a sort of charmed circle – maybe it really is getting away from Marcus at last! There’s some kind of simplicity and truth which I can just intuit – it’s somewhere there – it’s as if I were blind, as if I’d discovered not
Jack’s desperation to work his way out of the charmed circle echoes man’s overt ‘need’ to break from the illusion that he himself has created. But what makes him feel this need? Is it his creation that makes him think so? At a literal level, though the idea of the master seems damaging, the novel suggests that it is, nevertheless, important to create it. Creating the idea of a master and the illusion of meaning seems a damaging prospect but it is meaningful in retrospect. It is meaningful because it helps one discover not ‘sight,’ perhaps, but certainly ‘blindness’! The implication is that, by following the master, what one discovers may not be the reality but illusion. This discovery is a crucial part of the journey because, in retrospect, it proves meaningful to create the idea if only to discover that it is damaging. Such a discovery is in itself very redeeming. Thus, Jack’s words sum up the advantage of the entire journey of following the self-created master: When journeying with the master, what one gets is illusory; and, yet, what one wants is to break away from that illusion. However, to achieve it, one cannot help being deceived by the illusion. There is no other choice we have. The only way out is, actually, ‘through’ it. One of the dreams that Ludens has, wherein Leonardo appears in the garb of a priest, suggests this:

... Leonardo approached him with long strides holding out a paper in his left hand. He said to Ludens in a peremptory tone, ‘You must go on your bicycle and take this message to Milan.’ He handed the piece of paper to Ludens. Ludens said, ‘B-b-but, sir, I haven’t got a b-b-bicycle.’ Leonardo, pointing to the paper, said, ‘There’s your bicycle!’ Ludens looked down and saw the drawing of a bicycle which he had shown to Irina. He cried, ‘But, sir, this is not a bicycle, this is a drawing of a bicycle.’ Leonardo said, ‘You can ride it if you try hard enough.’ As he turned to go Ludens called after him, ‘What about the message?’ The reply was, ‘That is the message.’ (282)

This very insightful dream of Ludens again highlights the fact that the only way to get to reality is to go through illusion. In Leonardo’s words, the key to ride a real bicycle

sight, but blindness, I keep praying to the great painters, I feel like a worm.’ (520)
is to try and ride its image. The image is not the real bicycle but one can lay his hands on the real only through this image or illusion. It might seem like there is a disconnect between what we get and what we desire. But, again, the subtle suggestion is that to understand the reality it is important to realise that what we have been after is an illusion. Hence, there is a need to discover and understand illusion. In that way we may understand what is not reality. Once illusion is discovered, we may begin the real journey.

It is then we realise that this entire exercise has actually brought us back to where we began. Pondering over the sudden shift in life, Bellamy wonders,

. . . . But all this, all this shift and change, thought Bellamy, is part of the vast lie which surrounds me and wherein I move from one fantasy to another. I wanted to escape to solitude and darkness in a holy place, but the dark is just the old dark of meaninglessness and falsehood, which separates me from my friends and from the real world where people love and help each other, I even reject those who could help me to help others. (Murdoch, GK 153 - 54)

Bellamy rightly feels that all the shift and change that one feels during the journey with the master is part of the ‘vast lie’. One has merely travelled through the old dark world of meaninglessness which separates one from the real world of the inner self. But, again, the journey is not altogether meaningless. Referring to Marcus’s disappointment due to the rumours, Irina tells Ludens: “. . . He hasn’t made his great philosophical discovery, and now he’s found out he isn’t God. So what? He had to do it all himself, not like other people who take it for granted they’re not superman. He had to try it all and fail it all. He’s got enough mind left to accept that. He’s had a good run’ ” (Murdoch, MP 373-74). In one sense, the journey with the master is meaningful because it facilitates us to try and then to fail, instead of accepting failure beforehand. Indeed, the failure is not exactly a failure because, in the process, we get to discover what we are not – like how Marcus has, in the process, found out that he
isn’t God. As Irina puts it, despite the apparent failure, we could conclude that we have had a ‘good run.’ If nothing else, it forces us to turn within and re-turn to ourselves. Towards the end of the novel, when all the characters meet one another in a set up quite similar to the one with which the novel began, the narrator says:

There could not but be, as they all felt, something symbolic about this reunion. ‘Home is the sailor, home from the sea, and the hunter home from the hill,’ as Jack vaguely yet aptly quoted. Marcus was dead, Irina disposed of, Ludens was back in London, back with his friends, his quest over, his obsession ended. Jack too, who took this optimistic view of Ludens’s condition, was, as he felt and declared, definitely back home. (551)

Indeed, after the tedious journey of following Marcus, the characters are back ‘home,’ back to the beginning. They are home from the sailing, and home from the quest (hunt). They are home after discovering that the quest to find meaning has led them nowhere because there was, in truth, no meaning in the first place. Nevertheless, they had to go that far out in order to understand that they have to get back to themselves. In fact, this realisation or discovery is only a glimpse of the reality. Reality is momentary and relative, and one gets to that momentary reality many times in the journey.

So, what is the lesson to be learnt from this? The ‘act’ or process of the journey itself is of prime importance. Leonardo’s insistent resolve to go to Milan is also suggestive of the importance of making the journey. Though we may end where we began, it is important that we embark on the journey from illusion to reality. We may return to the beginning but, this time round, with a better understanding of the starting point. After Marcus’s death, Jack endorses this, saying, “‘Yes, I feel with painting that I’m back at the beginning again. Perhaps in art one always has to try to get back to the beginning, to feel that one might do anything, and that every sort of excellence is possible. . . . I’ve got to start again . . .’” (522). It is to be noted that
once the illusion of Marcus is dead, the characters feel they are back home, to reality. As Jack remarks, in art, perhaps, and certainly in life, one must always try and get back to the beginning, to the basics, to the roots. Needless to say, though it seems like one has to start all over again, it is a start with greater awareness. That is why, towards the end of the novel, Gildas says,

‘Who says he [Marcus] failed? Perhaps time will show. I’m sure he didn’t kill himself because he couldn’t invent a metaphysical system or make a great synthesis. He might have been afraid of insanity, that his mind might give way under the strain. He might have realised that he couldn’t express what he experienced, or experience what he conceived of. He began to fear the degradation of his thoughts, perhaps that shipwreck he spoke of. Whatever the reason he reached the point where the only thing available to him was the act.’ (559)

Superimposing Marcus’s predicament on Ludens’s, one understands that it is Ludens who might have been strained, and that it was he who couldn’t express the futility of the journey that he experienced and couldn’t experience the meaning that he conceived of. The plot gradually reveals that it is Ludens who fears the feeling of total breakdown (shipwreck). And, to save himself from the impending danger, all that is available to him as a solution is to persevere in the journey. Indeed, the journey is all that is available to him at the end. Even Bellamy, after being disillusioned about the idea of the master and his message, realises the importance of the ‘act’ and tells Clement,

‘It’s not just being his secretary and living here and helping him – I saw a path with a light shining on it, I saw everything I’ve been looking for – wanting to be in that monastery was a false way – then suddenly at last I found my way – wanting to have goodness is not enough, it’s work, finding the way is part of the work, I felt I had come home.’ (Murdoch, GK 363)

Bellamy’s words emphasise the sanctity of the act or work or the quest for the path that leads to meaning. The act itself is enough to liberate us from notions we have about ourselves. He rightly remarks that finding the way is only a part of the work.
This discovery brings him back home, away from the illusion of the meaning he thinks he is in search of. It is, to put it clearly, part of one’s work to outgrow the idea of the master. When the individual understands this, he can be at peace with himself. Thus, creating the idea of the master, undertaking the journey with him, and then recognising the need to outgrow the idea itself are vital phases of the journey in the first place. The dialogue between Louise and Clement, after the death of Peter, highlights once again the nature and importance of the master. Louise says,

‘. . . . Peter didn’t die for anything, he died accidentally, senselessly – he appeared out of a mystery which I have never understood, and now he has vanished leaving all this behind – if he had not appeared Lucas would not have coveted Aleph –’
‘If he had not appeared I should probably be dead. . . .’ (454)

The appearance and disappearance of the master is strange because the master is but the creation of the characters. Both Marcus and Peter, in the respective novels, appear and disappear very inexplicably. The other characters of the novels can neither understand the meaning behind their existence nor the reason for their death. Their life as well as their death is filled with enigma. It hints at the idea that they are real only in the imagination of the characters, otherwise the masters have no life or meaning by themselves. It is only by following them that the characters are able to unravel the mystery of their own being. It is, precisely, for this reason that the characters need the master. Indeed, the characters’ lives would have been stifling and static if it had not been for the appearance of the master. Referring to Mir, Joan says, “‘. . . . How that man has stirred us up, I think he’s liberated us somehow! I feel liberated’ ” (402). Towards the end of *The Green Knight*, when all the pairs are announced and they meet in Cora’s house, and drink a toast to Peter Mir, Clement says, “‘How strange, do you remember that drink which we had at Peter’s place before dinner, that “special”? Now we see what it was – it was a love potion!’ And
Joan said, ‘It’s as if all spells are broken and we are all set free!’” (448). Indeed, the characters are set free from the idea of the master. This is symbolically suggested by the death of Peter Mir and Marcus. These ‘master’ characters seem to exist only as long as the characters give them significance and power. Once the characters realise that these so-called masters are devoid of any powers, that they are rather mad and dependent, the masters meet their mysterious deaths.

However, after having gone through the cycle of illusion and disillusion, the characters get a faint glimpse of the actual reality. “‘To restore silence is the role of objects’” (Murdoch, *MP* 27), Jack rightly says to Franca. It underlines the fact that it is only after creating an object that one can understand that its role is to restore silence. Perhaps, the meaning of life, when ripped of its assumed extravagancies, remains bare and silent. And, one has to go all outward to understand that what is needed is for one to go ‘inward,’ to go within, to silence and a peaceful state. Our need to create fantasies, good or bad, is the outcome of the ego at work. But, our true self is silence and peace. However, what drives us to this understanding are the ideas which the ego creates, that act as a medium.

Pat’s comparison of Marcus to Christ subtly hints at the real nature of both. Generally, these figures are associated with definitions based on a lot of assumptions. Perhaps, they are just ordinary; and all that one believes they are is only an assumption. This perspective is reflected in Pat’s conversation with Ludens, after Marcus’s death:

‘... Now I think he’s a victim.’

‘... Like Christ on the cross all for nothing, like if Christ was just an ordinary man, a good man but full of sins as every man is, and a deceived man, who was wonderful but not as wonderful as he thought.’ (437)
Ludens supports Pat’s supposition that the master could be just ordinary. However, he disapproves of the fact that his death was for nothing. He says, “‘But even if it had been like that with Christ, even if it was like that, as I believe, it was not for nothing.’” Then Pat says, “‘Well, if it’s human things it’s all accident, maybe good comes, maybe bad, maybe nothing.’” Ludens replies, “‘That’s not an argument against trying to be good – one must try to be good – just for nothing’” (437). Ludens’s words assert that even the assumptions about the master are to be permitted and entertained because they do gradually lead one to awareness.

Above all, Ludens’s words add another insightful dimension to the concept of nothingness. When Pat says that, perhaps, nothing comes from life after all, Ludens’s reaction is spontaneous. He states that one has to be good, ‘just for nothing’. This suggests that life has to be lived for nothing, because the journey possibly leads to nothing. Nevertheless, it has to be undertaken. Marcus once narrates, to Ludens, an incident in one of the concentration camps where someone asked a guard “why?” and the guard answered “‘Hier ist kein warum’, here there is no why” (380). In this context, making a reference to the famous poem, ohne warum, the rose that is without “why”, Marcus explains, “‘The rose is without why, it has no foundation, no justification, no cause, it just exists, its simple being is what it truly is, there can be no further questions... One may say too that a description of the rose means nothing unless, as in poetry, it can be the rose’” (381).

These references give a definite insight into how life, too, in its own terms, is without a ‘why.’ It is, as Marcus remarks, beyond the reach of explanations or justifications or causes. It cannot be questioned because it is outside rational human discourse. Life exists for nothing, just as a rose exists for nothing. Against all definitions and descriptions, it just is. So the purpose of life is simply to ‘be’.
Unaware of this, Ludens searches frantically for meaning and answers. He questions Marcus about the power of the message:

‘But if we see it, if we find it, will it save us from becoming imbecile dwarfs?’

Marcus paused. He said, ‘I don’t really know the answer to that question. One would have to die. And never know.’ (243)

Marcus’s words highlight the fact that even if one dies, one can neither find nor gauge the impact of the message. It is beyond human comprehension. More interesting than Marcus’s words is his tone of exasperation and absolute sarcasm that hints at the futility of Ludens’s question. This is because, in truth, there is no message or ultimate solution in the sense that Ludens understands it. His misconception of life in general is reflected in his understanding of Marcus’s life. Ludens says, ‘Somehow he acted out the whole pilgrimage of modern man – to know almost everything, and then to want that one thing more, and perish trying to find it’ ” (556).

Ludens thinks that the goal of life is to know everything – to want to know that one ultimate, redeeming piece of knowledge, and to perish trying to seek it. Irrespective of his repeated failures, he still does not understand that there is no such knowledge and that trying to seek it is a fruitless endeavour. In fact, Marcus himself tells Ludens: “. . . First, there is no secret, in the sense in which you used to imagine it. And second, there can be no question of “living happily ever after”. I mean simply that we cannot see the future which may contain either happiness or terrible pain. . .’ ” (286). The sense of happiness which man looks forward to and the sense of terrible pain which he fears are both illusory. The end or object of the quest is not even happiness. The only worthwhile object of the quest is the quest itself.

At some point of the journey, man understands that it is useless to run after illusions which are disguised as solutions. But, again, that faint glimmer of realisation
vanishes ever so quickly and man once again renews the desire to continue the journey, to look for meaning and the answers outside. Sounding a warning against this, Marzillian says, “. . . though it is our duty to seek for knowledge, it is also incumbent on us to realise when it is denied us, and not to prefer a fake solution to no solution at all. . . ’” (509). As Marzillian rightly remarks, man is habituated to creating fake solutions when he finds no solutions. He finds it cosy to be cushioned in the illusion of happiness and meaning till he is shaken up by the flicker of reality. It is only someone like Dr. Marzillian, who has a faint knowledge of reality, who can speak boldly to Ludens: “ ‘Well, it only remains for us to say farewell and wish each other a happy journey through the hazards of our future pilgrimage’ ” (510). These words of wisdom highlight the fact that there is some good that comes out of the self-created hazards of the journey or the pilgrimage undertaken by man. Further, Marzillian bidding farewell to Ludens asserts the fact that the journey of life is highly individualistic. One has to navigate it alone.

A common thread running through this entire exercise of a journey is that man has a choice to ignore the fact that he holds the answers to all the questions, and is aware of the means to all ends. Irina’s appeal to Ludens not to excite her dad, Marcus, about writing a book on some universal message highlights this. She says, “ ‘. . . If you see something in what he’s after, it must be something that you provide yourself. Really what he says is completely muddled, it just doesn’t make sense’ ” (196). She also tells Ludens how the great mission is all in his mind. Bellamy receives a letter from the father: “. . . do not be miserable seeking for moral perfection. . . . do not seek for God outside your own soul” (Murdoch, GK 266). In fact, when Ludens insists on Marcus writing a book, Marcus himself says,

‘I can’t do it, Alfred. You must write the book. You evidently think you can make something out of all that stuff. You tried to put it all in order as if it were
a single argument, but all I can see is old thoughts placed end to end. You think there’s some great further philosophical step, some ultimate move, some ultimate place. But it’s no good, we can’t get there, human beings can’t get there, you can’t leap over your own shadow.’ (Murdoch, MP 340)

These words assert that it is Ludens who is in possession of ultimate knowledge. Unfortunately, he thinks that the ‘ultimate place’ or final destiny lies somewhere outside. On the contrary, it is within him. The irony is that he cannot access his real inner self unless he learns to leap over his shadow or illusion. That is why Marcus aptly says that man cannot get there because he cannot leap over the illusion – he has to necessarily go through it.

However, what and why is there this pressing need to seek a master, an external solution to all our inner problems? And, why do we believe that the truth is beyond our reach? Father Damien writes to Bellamy James:

. . . . Your wish for a revelation or a ‘great sign’ should be put away, it is a mere stumbling-block. . . . After your long and full confession I think you should abstain from brooding emotionally over early sins. An excessive cultivation of guilt may become a neurotic, even an erotic, indulgence. You should not imagine yourself to be in an ‘interesting spiritual condition’! What is needed is a cool, even cold, truthfulness. . . . (Murdoch, GK 39)

This leads us to a series of vital questions. When enquiring into the nature of things, why do we refuse to look within for answers? Is it because we are afraid that we might not be in possession of potent truths? Irina says, “ . . . My life is a puzzle picture with no solution. Whoever created me left out some essential piece’ ” (Murdoch, MP 255). In a letter to Bellamy, the father writes the lines of Virgil to Dante, “ ‘Your will is free, upright and sound, it would be wrong not to be ruled by its good sense’ ” (Murdoch, GK 368). Upon reading the letter, Bellamy grieves that he hasn’t got such a will. Sadly and ironically, he is unaware that he is in possession of such a will. In a conversation with Ludens, Gildas says, “ ‘. . . . As for deep foundations, what a hope! Our lives rest upon contingency, rubble, rubbish. There
aren’t any foundations except mud and chaos’” (Murdoch, MP 18). All in all, the characters prove ignorant of the actual substance within them. They presume that meaning is outside and rubble is inside. And, life in general, and the novel in particular prove that it is just the contrary.

The more we rely on the external, the more we distance ourselves from our true selves. Consequently, we feel a sense of incompleteness which causes us an unrestrained amount of agony. Talking about the human mind, Marzillian expatiates:

‘This is a charming place, a beautiful place yet it is also a gateway into hell. The diseased mind is in perpetual anguish, they suffer it, the misery and mortality, the hopeless doomed limitation of the human soul, usually hidden from us, audible only as a threatening murmur, a ground bass of perpetual anxiety, the sound of contingency itself. Do you know what it is to abominate the thing that one is, to be afraid of one’s own mind, to have a mind which is covered in rats, a mind which continually maims itself and is smeared with its own blood? No, I can see that you don’t, you are one of the lucky ones, self-loving and self-satisfied, immured in innocence. For I speak not only of the afflicted ones here, but of many who walk the wide world with smiling masks, but whose souls live in eternal fire, in a shame which robs them of their humanity. Yet all men, even you, carry within their minds some sharp thorn, some bud of cancerous pain, which perhaps will never be activated, but from which, very rarely, they receive some instant spasm of incomprehensible anguish.’ (263)

The human mind, as Marzillian puts it, is believed to be both a charming place as well as a hell. Both these assessments are, in truth, illusions. The journey of the psyche from illusion to reality is not an altogether pleasant one. Shuffling between the ruining illusion and the redeeming reality, man experiences ‘perpetual anguish’. Even worse, this tedious journey gives rise to ‘incomprehensible anguish’ – incomprehensible, perhaps, because the entire journey consists of walking into blindness to discover blindness. Hence, man is unable to find real happiness in the darkness. He resorts to wearing happy masks to hide his soul which is in eternal fire. But it is important to ask the question – Why does he not find happiness? When Ludens talks to Marcus
about his eagerness to see more, and understand more what happiness is like, Marcus says, “‘You want everything to be like something’” (343). This suggests that man is incapable of finding real happiness because he has his own created image of it which most often does not match with the real. Indeed, he wants everything to be like something, and never accepts anything at its face value. The need to create an image of happiness leads man to an illusion of happiness.

But why does man not seek happiness in the right place, where it really is? Why does he not look within to find it? Is it because he believes that it is a less complicated affair to seek it outside? Perhaps, yes. The narrator says that Ludens, instead of attempting to analyse Marcus’s destructive conduct, “... had silently made a vow that henceforth he would follow Marcus wherever he went until he could satisfy himself whether Marcus really possessed a secret, and whether he, Ludens, could come into possession of it” (16). Not only does Ludens try to analyse the truth behind the so-called secret in Marcus’s possession, he also overlooks Marcus’s destructive power. Ludens blindly plunges into believing that Marcus has the message. Even if there are some fleeting doubts he has, he convinces himself that he will find the message only in Marcus. Even Joan, in the other novel, realises that Harvey and the girls are under a spell of innocence which needs to be broken, she says to Louise, “‘... We need someone to come to break the enchantment, someone from elsewhere. ...’” (Murdoch, GK 12). Hence, the characters in both the novels make repeated efforts to seek answers from the outside.

All in all, we find a pattern in man’s journey of life: First, he ‘imagines’ that meaning is outside; then, he slowly begins to ‘believe’ that it is outside; and, after that, he ‘insists’ that it is outside. When he realises that it is dangerous to search for
meaning in something external to him, he frantically begins to look for a way out, or rather for a way in. In one of their intellectual discussions, Marcus tells Ludens,

‘I am confronted by several, quite different, dilemmas. Or, one might say, by a parting of the ways, by several different roads.’
Ludens, tense, said, to provoke him, ‘Can’t these ways be reconciled and seen to be ultimately only one way?’
‘That is the worst temptation. It may even be that just here is where I have to stop.’ (Murdoch, MP 161)

It is when one identifies that the journey has led one quite far away from home, that, as Marcus suggests, one needs to stop – before it becomes irreversible. If this does not happen, one can lose track of where the journey began, and this can turn out potentially dangerous. Also, Ludens’s temptation to reconcile the different paths into one suggests the desire for an ideal and ultimate solution, something similar to his idea of the ‘ultimate wisdom’ that redeems. Marcus refutes this, making it clear that wanting to have one final way is the worst temptation. It is ideal to stop there before one falls further. But, it is not easy to pause and revert back. However disastrous, the journey continues.

Despite the fear of losing the way, there is a fleeting chance that by undertaking the journey, following it to the end, and finally realising that all that is without is just an illusion, we may be forced to look within at the source of all confusion and resolution. Referring to thinking and concentration, Marcus says, ‘They have not led me to any conclusion which I could write down in a book. Whether they have led me to where I am now, I am not sure. Perhaps that is something which I shall know later. It may be that all that striving was nothing, and that finding out that it was nothing was the point. . .’ ” (340-41). These words make it clear that the journey, however dreadful and long it may seem, actually leads to inner reality. That is why the journey is in itself important. Is there a short-cut to reach the
reality? Marcus tells Ludens, “‘Human life is very short, Alfred, it is a short walk’” (442). Perhaps, after all, the path to reality is short. It is actually a short walk because one has to be simply oneself to reach the reality. This is undoubtedly what Marcus’s apparently pessimistic words also suggest. But, Ludens responds,

‘Yes, but for what you are destined to do, long enough. You are young. You will travel on, and I will travel with you.’

. . .

‘. . . But I am the slave of your wisdom and I shall always understand later. I can endure strange judgements and steep paths.’

‘I want you to believe that my life, though it may be a failure, is not just an accident. I’m afraid I put this badly.’ (442)

Ludens’s words clearly suggest that though the path is short, for what the idea of the master is destined to do it is long enough. Ludens does not know that he is destined to take the long path and not the short one. However, for him, the long path is inevitable. Surprisingly, the human psyche has the endurance to survive ‘strange judgements and steep paths’ and come back realised. That is why Marcus confesses to Ludens that though his life seems a failure, it is not an accident. Certainly, it is not. Marcus is a deliberate creation, designed to enable the journey back home. But, as Ludens puts it, we understand it only later, i.e., it is only in retrospect that we find that we were actually progressing. In fact, the human mind always finds ways to progress. It creates a trail to enable us to move on. Marzillian’s insights highlight how human beings are way-using creatures. He also sums up the nature and purpose of the entire journey:

‘. . . Thoughts, however terrible, are not necessarily destructive – they may be a path, a way – they may represent a progress, even a therapeutic process. We are way-using creatures. You yourself have followed Marcus on a path, indeed a long path, over many years. . . . Even in the short time that he has been here he has moved on, he has changed and made experiments and made discoveries. The psyche is a vast space within which we seek for God – you understand my use of that word – a space of which most people are unaware, crouching as they are in some tiny corner of it, living the life of a beetle in a hole. Marcus has travelled far into remote and strange regions, not just as an objective scholarly spectator but as one who lives and becomes what he
knows. He has the godlike power of metamorphosis, he participates, he tastes. It is impossible to travel so far and live so completely without enduring the black contingent grief which underlies all human existence, without taking the pathway into the most extreme places of human suffering. That price is paid for other knowledge, the knowledge of God, the energy of pure creation, the infinite possibility of the soul, the joy and pain of power and of the necessity of laying it aside. Much of this you yourself have perhaps seen and in part understood. You have tried to check him, to contain him, even to guide him, but you have failed, and may have learnt something from the failure. I hope that you will go on, I hope you will continue to have faith in him and in the part which you can play in his pilgrimage.’ (431-32)

Marzillian’s words bring out various important dimensions of the journey of the human mind. In the process of following the master, Ludens has unknowingly travelled into many remote and strange regions of his own self. However unfamiliar, it is important to participate in the unfamiliar illusion because, as aforesaid, one cannot realise the truth without understanding illusion. Of course, such knowledge is not easy. As a psychiatrist puts it, ‘black contingent grief’ is the price we pay to realise the ultimate truth that we are in quest of.

Though the entire journey of following the illusory master seems a failure, there is certainly something to learn from it. Indeed, failure alone can bring us to this priceless knowledge. That is why the idea of the master is not to be resented because it ‘facilitates’ progression. In his review of *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*, Madigan says,

> Certain things were clear for Murdoch. First, we are all initially sunk in the ‘fat, relentless ego’, to which ‘fantasy’ panders through fictive consolations (of which ‘God’ may be one) and self-pity. But as with Plato, art can also lift us ‘up’; through the ‘imagination’ the major conversion that is necessary also becomes possible. (Madigan 1075)

Therefore, one finds that even Marzillian advises Ludens to continue to have hope and faith in Marcus, and go on with the journey that Marcus has set him on.
It is true that most of the time man moves outward in search of meaning. His belief that meaning can be discovered outside smacks of a degree of falsehood. It implies that merely being truthful to ourselves would enable us to realise the truth about the purpose of life because then we would not be deluded by our imagination, which is ever pushing us to create an external entity to gratify our thirst for knowledge. But, at this juncture, it becomes important to ask the question: Why are we not truthful to ourselves, knowing that lies are irreversibly damaging? Jack repeatedly says to Franca, “. . . . It is lies which poison people’s lives, lies and fear and muddle. Lying makes people demoralized and morally careless. . . .” (Murdoch, *MP* 38).

Being truthful enables us to unearth the truth of life. What it does do is make this process less of an ordeal. But, can man experience this absolute truth? Certainly not. While undertaking the journey, what we get a glimpse of is only momentary flickers of truth here and there. But even a flicker is enough to give us, perhaps, the shred of clarity that can get our feet on ground.

Being truthful takes precedence over fear. Even a fleeting sensation can, sometimes, release us from our deepest darkest fears. At this juncture, it is important to explore what it means to be truthful. Jack says to Franca, “‘Indeed, you have a wonderful nature. Almost too wonderful – too unselfish – as if you were – what I meant by remote – sort of sleepy, untouched, abstracted, not really present’” (148). Here, Franca is the representative of the multitude of humanity who, in an endeavour to be ‘too wonderful’ become remote from the truth. ‘Too wonderful’ is suggestive of illusion and fantasy. Ensnared in unreality, we are ‘sleepy’, ‘abstracted’ and ‘not really present’. And, yes, from this, one can deduce that being truthful is nothing but being awake and grounded in the present. Jack’s words indirectly suggest that one
should not be distracted from the present. Franca realises this in her trip to the Cathedral with Maisie. Near the Cathedral,

Franca, overwhelmed, blinded, felt faint and sat down, then hurried out into the sunshine. Then watching the playing children and the frisking dogs and the summer dresses of the girls tugged at by the breeze, she tried vainly to repeat the experience. What came to her instead, as a sort of consolation prize, was a sense of, perhaps just an idea of, living in the present. If only she could resort to that at will, like a shot of morphia. Yet what was living in the present, could it be done, was it what she was doing now? (318 -19)

Perhaps, Franca is just being present, just watching, just observing, neither attaching any purpose to the act of watching, nor feeling any attachment to the act of observing. This is what it means to live in the present. It is this momentary glimmer which rescues Franca, in particular, and man, in general, from drowning into depressing unreality: “. . . Often, in her kitchen or her boudoir, she did nothing, she simply sat absolutely still and breathed, sensing her continued existence, preserving herself, taking refuge in a timeless present” (171).

‘Being’ in the present enables one to be an objective spectator to the happenings of life. Life is then viewed from an appropriate distance, far away from fantasy. As a result, one is not driven into the falsities of the external world: Towards the end of *The Message to the Planet*, the narrator reports that all the characters have come back ‘home’ from the illusory journey. But, referring to Gildas, he says, “. . . Gildas, the enlightened spectator, had never been away” (551). Indeed, the enlightened spectator or objective onlooker who is fully aware of his role as an onlooker can never be far away from reality.

One dimension of being truthful is to live in the present as an ‘enlightened spectator’. After Marcus makes a public confession that he is just an ordinary person, and does not deserve any adoration and worship, he feels at peace with himself.
Ludens wonders, “. . . . The idea that in doing so he had surrendered his dignity, destroyed his prestige, and made a complete fool of himself did not seem to occur to him, or if it did, did not seem to trouble him” (384).

This thought-provoking line provides an insight into what it feels like to be truthful. Marcus’s confession reflects the surrender of his dignity and the destruction of his prestige – but these are not as important as the intent with which Marcus accepts the situation. Ludens’s reflections suggest that Marcus did not seem to be troubled by the entire episode. This means that he was dispassionate as regards the act performed and its outcome. He could achieve this only because he had outgrown the idea of himself being a master and was perfectly truthful about himself. That is why the narrator says that even if it had occurred to Marcus that he was making a fool of himself (which is an illusion), it would not have ‘troubled’ him. With this act, Marcus, as the novel suggests, gives us a small, but profound, example of how one can be truthful to oneself. After this scene of public confession, Ludens feels, “. . . . Some curtain between himself and Marcus had this day been torn. . . . Was it possible that, by so undoing himself, Marcus had damaged, perhaps forever, some precious tension of awe and fear which had always existed between him and Ludens?” (386).

This episode makes a great impact on Ludens. His ‘image’ of Marcus has been shattered. Moreover, it drives him to undo his perception of himself as well as of the image he created. This experience is the beginning of Ludens’s journey back home, to his true self. Now that he is devoid of the illusory image of himself and of the master, he can, finally, commence the journey within. This incident reiterates the point that being truthful to oneself is the easiest way to look within. But is it easy to be truthful? Is it as simple as it seems? Recapitulating the confession scene, Ludens wonders,

. . . . Did Marcus really not care about the fall from that eminence, indeed was rejoicing in it? It could be that the ‘fall’, with its scattering of all solemnity,
had actually removed the danger, the menace, the ‘dark matter’ of which Marzillian had twice spoken, creating a fresh simplicity, an interim, a new start of various thoughts. Alternatively, that clearing of the space might have a more sinister significance. (386)

Ludens’s apprehensions about Marcus’s fall are not altogether baseless. They suggest that the entire episode is pointless if Marcus actually rejoices in it. It has to be devoid of the feeling of accomplishment which, in turn, is the outcome of ego. There should be absolutely no sense of achievement associated with the act. Only then can the act be said to be pure, devoid of the selfish machinations of the ego. If this does not happen, as Ludens fears, the space left by the illusory ‘undoing’ may have sinister significance. What is it like to experience the undoing of one’s image of oneself? What does it mean to really outgrow oneself? In a dialogue between Bellamy and Mir, Bellamy says,

‘He [Lucas] is very truthful –’
‘But prepared to deceive.’
‘I mean he’s honest, he sees the terrible things, he doesn’t try to cover them up or imagine them away – the evil of the world, the senselessness of it all, the rottenness of us ordinary people, our fantasy life, our selfishness –’
‘You seem to want to see him as a saint.’
‘In a way I do – I mean a sort of counter-saint – I mean he’s above, beyond–’
‘Beyond good and evil.’ (Murdoch, GK 171-72)

Being truthful is being beyond good and evil. This can be achieved by trying to ‘see’ the world as it is, in all its beauty and rottenness – as an observer.

Thus, the shortest way to unravel the layers of reality is by allowing oneself to be truthful (‘fighting for truth’). But, since it is difficult to do so, man generally does not even attempt to understand and fight for this idea – the idea of being truthful and looking within. Perhaps the difficulty, as Marcus points out, is “‘When one is very close to Truth itself, truthfulness vanishes. One is simply constrained. That is the instructive picture. . .’ ” (Murdoch, MP 244). This means that when one is very close
to the truth, the attribute or the image of truthfulness vanishes. Truth becomes everything. It is beyond everything. This reminds one of the Platonic allegory of cave which Murdoch herself interprets as a ‘moral pilgrimage’ by which one comes to see the real world in the light of the sun, i.e., one gets to see the world ‘as it really is’ (qtd. in Insole 114) and above all one gets to look at the sun (truth) itself.

Generally, when we say we are in pursuit of truth or that we want the truth, we unconsciously put the quality of truth or truthfulness into a constrained framework. To put it simply, we even create an image of how truth should be. But, when we are actually close to truth, it ceases to remain in the framework we imagine. Perhaps, ‘that’ is the difficulty. As human beings, we find it hard to comprehend anything that is not placed in a neat framework. It is this necessity, in fact, that drives us to create the framework of illusions.

This is also the reason behind the creation of archetypes. We have a human need to comprehend the limitless, but we want it in a ‘limited’ framework for easy comprehension. The illusion we create works in the same way. It provides us with a framework to begin with. However, at some point, the framework should be given up. We need to break away from it. According to Murdoch the world is not understandably patterned. She says, “Form is the temptation of love and its peril, whether in art or life: to round off a situation, to sum up a character. But the difference is that art has got to have form, whereas life need not” (qtd. in Todd, Iris Murdoch 45).

In her novels, she satirises those who pursue a pattern. Referring to Michael’s expectations of life, the narrator says, “It was an aspect of Michael’s belief in God, and one which, although he knew it to be dangerous, he could never altogether reject,
that he expected the emergence in his life of patterns and signs. He had always felt
himself to be a man with a definite destiny, a man waiting for a call” (Murdoch, *The
Bell* 83). Like Michael, most of Murdoch’s characters, run after the illusory pattern
and in the process distance themselves from the truth. The novels, at various
junctures, suggest that only when such pattern or framework breaks, the ‘image’ of
truth or truthfulness vanishes. And, what remains, then, is the simple truth. This
reminds one of how “Plato makes the assumption that value is everywhere, that the
whole of life is movement on a moral scale, all knowledge is a moral quest, and the
mind seeks reality and desires the good, which is a transcendent source of spiritual
power, to which we are related through the idea of truth” (Robjant 1001).

*The Message to the Planet* suggests that this is the point of culmination in the
journey with the master. Creating the idea of the master and following him through
the blind path, one gets to discover illusion. This is the discovery of what is not the
truth. But this knowledge is only a partial facet of the truth. What constitutes the other
dimension? The novel very subtly introduces this dimension when Jack pleads with
Franca to stay with him. Franca thinks, “... I must say just the right things, produce
just the right words, it’s all far more complicated than I thought, there’s a whole other
dimension, a whole other game to be played out. But what is this game, this inevitable
necessary move, is it a search for truth or a cunning manoeuvre?” (Murdoch, *MP*
537).

By following the master, man establishes a quest for truth. But, as aforesaid,
he is led through delusion to illusion. This makes one wonder whether the quest was
meant to lead to truth or whether the quest itself is a cunning manoeuvre. If it is the
latter, there is a need to explore and understand the real nature of this intimidating
manoeuvre or the idea of undesirability. No doubt, Marcus who seemingly represents
the idea of desirability is also referred to as “. . . intellectual demon figure with an alternative vision of life” (Bove 124).

What is it to stand at the threshold of this illusion or the idea of undesirability? In order to find answers to these questions and to discover the other dimensions to the journey of life, it is important to explore the inevitable tryst with the ‘cunning manoeuvre’.